COWICHAN RIVER PROVINCIAL PARK

PURPOSE STATEMENT AND ZONING PLAN

March 2003

Approved by:

Date:

Dick Heath
Regional Manager
Environmental Stewardship Division

Date:

Nancy Wilkin
Assistant Deputy Minister
Environmental Stewardship Division

COWICHAN RIVER PROVINCIAL PARK
Purpose Statement and Zoning Plan

Primary Role
The **primary** role of Cowichan River Provincial Park is to protect the natural values associated with a scenic and world-renowned salmon-bearing river. The Cowichan River is internationally known for its highly valuable and productive fish habitat. Species include coho, chinook and chum salmon and steelhead, rainbow, brown and cutthroat trout. The river's riparian environment provides an important wildlife corridor and habitat for wolverine, gray wolf, black bear, cougar, Roosevelt elk, bald eagle, osprey, hawks, owls, and a variety of amphibians and insects.

The park also protects representative Douglas-fir and western hemlock forest communities and rare wild flowers. The Garry oak stand in the park may be the most westerly in Canada. Wildflowers such as the endangered cup-clover have been recorded near Skutz Falls and other rare plants include blue-eyed Mary and the fawn lily.

Containing over 750 hectares (and with additional lands to be added to the park), the park contributes significantly to the representation of the highly impacted and under-represented Nanaimo Lowland Ecosection (23 percent of the CWHxm1 biogeoclimatic variant in the Nanaimo Lowlands is protected in Cowichan River Provincial Park).

Secondary Role
The **secondary** role of this park is to provide a wide variety of land and water-based recreation opportunities in a popular destination area of southern Vancouver Island. River-oriented recreation activities include wild salmon and steelhead fishing, swimming, kayaking, tubing and picnicking. Trail-based recreation activities include hiking, horseback riding, biking, wildlife viewing and nature appreciation. The historic 20 kilometre Cowichan River Trail and the recently completed Trans Canada Trail (with refurbished trestles), provides access for hikers, bikers and equestrians. Drive-in, walk-in and group camping opportunities are dispersed between two campgrounds – one at Skutz Falls and the other at Stoltz pool. The park also contains day use picnicking areas at Skutz Falls and Marie Canyon. Cowichan River Provincial Park serves both local area residents and the regional Cowichan Valley population. Sandy Pool and Cowichan River regional parks (CVRD) are located adjacent to the eastern parcels of this linear park.

Tertiary Role
The **tertiary** role of the park is to protect and present significant cultural and historic values. Nominated to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System, the Cowichan has long played an important role with local First Nations. The name Cowichan is derived from the Coast Salish word "Khowutzun" meaning "land warmed by the sun." The park has a rich and diverse cultural history for the Cowichan Tribes and contains archaeological sites and important area's for traditional sustenance and spiritual use.

During the early 1900s, the river also served as a transportation corridor to Lake Cowichan for local logging operations. Today, old spring board stumps, remnants of camps and rail lines testify to the area's important logging history.

The natural and cultural treasures protected within this park earned it BC Heritage River status and a nomination for Canadian Heritage River status. The management of this park is

supported by a diverse array of volunteer arrangements and projects, as well as agreements with Cowichan Tribes and the Cowichan Valley Regional District.

Known Management Issues	Response
Lack of long term management direction for park (Background Report, Recreation Plan and Trail Management Plan have been completed).	Initiate in 2003/2004, in association with First Nations, CVRD, interest groups, stakeholders and community involvement, a park management planning process.
Increased development of private lands adjacent to the park, pressure for commercial recreation opportunities.	Over 500 hectares of land has been purchased over the past 5 years and will be added to the park. Other parcels have also been identified for future acquisition to complete Cowichan River corridor land acquisition strategy.
Increasing recreation demands, unauthorized activities, vegetation removal, etc. Impact from Trans Canada Trail and increasing visitation/access from residents and tourists in the area for recreational and commercial activities (e.g. guide outfitting, rentals, concessions, facilities etc.).	Strategic presence of staff, increased liaison with user groups, contractors, volunteers presence, Trail Advisory Committee, etc. to assist in protecting the park's natural, cultural and recreation values.
First Nations consultation and cultural and traditional use of Cowichan River.	Consult with Cowichan Tribes to gain additional information on traditional use and input into future management of the park.
Cowichan River Canadian Heritage River nomination.	Continue with the Canadian Heritage River nomination. Designation is expected in late-2003.

Zoning

The campgrounds and day use areas, including trailheads, service area and walk-in campsites, are within the Intensive Recreation Zone (approximately 6% of the park). Areas of special cultural and natural significance as well as the entire Cowichan River contained within the park boundary will be zoned Special Features (approximately 19% of the park). The remainder of the park (approximately 75%) is zoned Natural Environment.

Conservation

Representation - ecosection	☒	Nanaimo Lowland Ecosection. This ecosection is under-represented (1.41%) in the protected areas system. Although 35 protected areas contribute toward the representation of the heavily disturbed and fragmented Nanaimo Lowland Ecosection, most are very small. Cowichan River is a major contributor as it accounts for 14.3% of the total protected areas system representation of this ecosection, making the park the third greatest contributor to the representation of this ecosection.
- biogeoclimatic subzone/variant	☒	CWHxm1 biogeoclimatic variant is poorly represented in the protected areas system (2.07%); Cowichan River provides the third best representation of this BEC unit (behind Desolation Sound and Elk Falls), accounting for 7.18% of its total representation. Cowichan River accounts for 23.9% of this BEC unit within the Nanaimo Lowland Ecosection. Cowichan River contributes minimally (0.9%) to the poorly represented CDF mm variant (2.43% protected).
Special Feature	☒	Protects from encroaching urban development, a provincially and federally significant river with high natural and cultural values.
Rare/Endangered Values	☒	Cowichan River Provincial Park contains several rare and endangered plants, including cup clover (*Trifolium cyathiferum*), blue-eyed Mary (*Collinsia graniflora*), and the white fawn lily (*Erythronium oregonum*). A Garry oak stand within the park may be the most westerly in Canada.
Scientific/Research Opportunities	☒	Lack of knowledge on natural and cultural values for the newly established parklands.

Recreation

Representation Backcountry	☐	
Destination	☒	Popular campgrounds, day-use areas, hiking, biking and provincially/regionally significant river-based recreation.

Travel corridor	☒	Trans Canada Trail along length of park, as well as local roads, create multiple access routes. Canadian Heritage River status will increase visitation and focus more attention on the river's natural and cultural values. Part of Cowichan Valley and Lake Cowichan area recreation corridor.
Local recreation	☒	Popular day-use site for hiking, biking and river-based recreation (fishing, swimming, tubing, kayaking.); camping and group camping facilities.
Special Opportunities	☐	
Education/Interpretation Opportunities	☒	Wildlife viewing, salmon runs; nature appreciation, photography and interpretation of Garry oak and wildflower plant communities.

Cultural Heritage

Representation	☒	Long history of continuous use by First Nations (Cowichan Tribes); European settlement in late 1880s. River used for log transport prior to CNR rail line in 1924. Site of some of the earliest logging on the island, much of it by rail.
Special Feature	☒	Cedar canoe remnant identified; several early logging and rail remnants; Cowichan River Fish and Game trail from Glenora to Lake Cowichan constructed prior to 1969 by volunteer fishers. BC Heritage River; nominated as a Canadian Heritage River.

Other Management Considerations

Other Designations	☒	BC Heritage River, nominated as a Canadian Heritage River.
Relationship to other PAs	☐	
Co-operative Management Arrangements	☐	
Partnerships	☒	Agreement with Cowichan Tribes to develop and manage Indian Reserve land near Skutz Falls. Management agreement

		with Cowichan Valley Regional District for Sandy Pool Regional Park.
Vulnerability	☒	Increased recreation and commercial guiding demand; overcrowding, vandalism to natural and cultural values.
Relationship to other Strategies	☒	Proximity to Lake Cowichan (Gateways project) and Trans Canada Trail.

Area: 753 hectares (a number of private lands have been acquired and will be added to the park in 2003)

Date of establishment: July 12, 1995

Zoning Map - Cowichan River Provincial Park Map 1

Projection: Albers Equal Areas
Datum: NAD83

Intensive Recreation
Natural Environment
Special Feature
Protected Area Boundary

0 2
km

Produced in Mar 2003 for Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection by MSRM, Decision Support Services

This is a visual representation only and should not be used for legal purposes.

Zoning Map - Cowichan River Provincial Park Map 2

Projection: Albers Equal Area
Datum: NAD83

Intensive Recreation
Natural Environment
Special Feature
Protected Area Boundary

0 1
km

Produced in Mar 2003 for Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection by MSRM, Decision Support Services

This is a visual representation only and should not be used for legal purposes.